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ABSTRACT

An overview is provided of the tribal college movement, including information on the students, curricula, funding, and future of these institutions. The paper begins by examining the history of the establishment of tribal colleges, citing the influence of the civil rights movement of the 1960's, never-realized interest in establishing a single national university to serve all tribes, and the creation of tribal colleges by individual tribes, beginning with the establishment of Navajo Community College in 1968. Next, common traits of the early tribal colleges are explored, including tribal charter and control; a mission strongly committed to the enhancement, preservation, and teaching of tribal culture; and a commitment to strong transfer and vocational functions. The paper then looks at the curricula of individual colleges as a reflection of institutional mission and tribal needs, underscoring the importance of Indian and Tribal Studies programs and courses and programs related to such contemporary issues as tribal management and federal laws. A profile of tribal college students is presented next, indicating that most are from the reservation, older than traditional college students, and often the first in their families to attend college. Additional information on Native American participation in higher education is also provided. After addressing the federal government's responsibility for and failure to adequately fund the education of Indians on reservations, the paper points to other sources of funding. Next, the paper discusses the formation and role of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium, and identifies reasons for the success of tribal colleges. Finally, prospects for the survival of the tribal college movement are analyzed. Information on tribal college funding and enrollments is appended. (KP)

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Tribal Colleges

A Success Story

by

James F. Hill

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The development of the tribal college movement represents an exciting era in post secondary education. It establishes a precedent of success that stands in stark contrast to the failures the federal government has made in Indian education during the past 480 years.

Why were tribal colleges established? The colleges began in response to the conditions experienced at off-reservation institutions. From the beginning, tribal colleges addressed the problems of financial aid limitations, cultural isolation and family considerations. Second, they met the need for a local forum to discuss community and tribal issues. Third, tribal colleges helped strengthen the tribe through academic learning, training and cultural preservation. (1) During the civil rights movement of the late 1960s, the rise of Indian activism and Native self-determination came to the forefront of the national political scene. The credibility of the federal government as the protector of tribes began to erode in the eyes of tribal leaders. At the same time, tribal leaders recognized the vulnerability of their own tribal ways. They believed governmental agencies and centralized programs did not offer promising solutions to Native issues; self determination and self governance appeared to be their only course of action. They knew the federal educational policies were not serving their young people. All too often the young would leave their reservation to enroll in a college, then, within a semester, return discouraged. Community leaders recognized that dropouts served neither themselves nor the community. To replace central control by the

government, both leaders and tribal elders envisioned locally controlled and locally focused institutions.

Since 1911 the idea of a single national college or university to serve all tribes had been considered, but never became a reality. Tribal colleges were established as individual tribes began to address their own post secondary educational needs. (2) The Navajo nation was first to resolve this issue. It established the Navajo Community College in Tsaile, AZ, in 1968. By creating an institution of higher education, the Navajo nation sought to encourage Navajo youth to become contributing members of the Navajo community and the world society. (3) Soon other community colleges were established: D-Q University, Davis, CA; Oglala Lakota College near Kyle, SD (Pine Ridge reservation); and Sinte Gleska College in Rosebud, SD.

Most of these early pioneers believed that through a mixture of traditional ways and non-Indian education their people could gain control over their own lives. They reasoned they had at least one resource left that wasn't stolen from them -- their brains. (4) The Oglala Lakota College mission statement's four parts; tribal, Cultural, Academic and Community, best illustrates this mixture of tradition and non-Indian education. (5)

Three other waves were felt in the 1970s and 1980s. Eleven colleges were founded between 1973 and 1975; six more between 1977 and 1978 and three others in the 1980s. In the summer of 1993 the last two tribal colleges were established.

Early tribal colleges had several common traits. First,

they were tribally chartered and controlled. For example, the Standing Rock Tribal College is controlled by the Sioux and the Nebraska Indian Community College was chartered by the Omaha, Santee Sioux and Winnebagos(6)(7). Second, their philosophy and mission statement were strongly committed to the enhancement, preservation and teaching of their culture and Indian studies. Third, They were committed to the development of a strong, two year transfer program and vocational/occupational programs. For example, Fort Berthold Community College has a transfer agreement with University of North Dakota. Finally, all had a dedicated Board of Trustees, faculties, administration and staff (8).

Nowhere are these college mission statements and philosophy emphasized more strongly than in their curriculum. Each of the colleges focuses on their tribes needs. Since all begin as 2 year institutions, most still offer vocational, paraprofessional and professional courses. Salish Kootenais Community College, Pablo, MT, first offered courses in forestry -- a dominant industry in Montana. In time it added courses in secretarial skills, and early childhood education in response to Headstart programs and day care centers on the reservation. Two colleges offer Baccalaureate degrees in education; Sinte Gleska and Oglala Lakota. Sinte Gleska now has a Master's degree program in education. Others offer degrees in social service. Graduates of these programs can find work in government and tribal agencies. Again, at Sinte Gleska, the curriculum contributes to tribal development and community education with programs ranging from alcohol awareness to creation of new

economic policies. (9) Some colleges are expanding into business and public administration programs. Educators believe entrepreneurial skills should be taught to revive a sluggish tribal economy. Casino management should be offered to meet the need for jobs created from reservation gambling. (10)

Indian/Tribal studies programs are helping the tribes meet the challenges which destroy their way of life. Surprisingly, there are Indian students who are ignorant of their own culture. Needing more than just academic or vocational tools to succeed, the students must know who they are as Indians, what their tribe's culture is and how language helps to preserve all these values. (11) For many tribes, the community tribal colleges are restoring lost language skills, arts, music and the ancestral life force that have been forgotten. Courses offered at Little Big Horn College, such as "Oral Literature of the Crow", "Social Issues of the American Indian", and "History of the Chiefs and Economics in Indian Country", sustain the tribe's cherished way of life. These courses are offered at a crucial time in tribal history when fluency in Native languages is diminishing rapidly. At Oglala Lakota College, teacher certification in Lakota studies including Lakota language courses, is offered to prepare teachers interested in working on the reservation. (12) At Dull Knife College, students can learn their tribe's native crafts and beadwork, and about plants used in food, medicine or sacred ceremonies. Traditions and stories once taught by parents and elders are being taught at college. At Salish Kootenai College, Coyote stories teach students of "the wise old Coyote" who gave

them good and useful things as well as greed and anger.

Tribal colleges also deal with contemporary issues. Courses on tribal management and economics, and federal laws pertaining to Native Americans are common. Computer applications of Crow art work have a practical, as well as aesthetic, side. These unique courses have created some difficulty when students transfer to a four year institution. Articulation agreements have been reached, or are now being negotiated, with supporting four year universities. (13) These Indian/Tribal studies pay dividends. Students gain intellectual tools from academic and vocational curriculum and the pride, knowledge and strength from tribal studies. Those tribes which have tribal colleges will have the means to retain, impart to the students and enrich the tribe's language, culture and heritage. Those that do not will suffer from minimal and sporadic support from public and private higher education institutions. Tribal colleges that enjoy tribal studies will emerge as the natural leaders in the fight to provide tribal studies at the higher education level.(14)

Who studies at these colleges? Most students enrolled at tribal colleges are from the reservation. They tend to be older than the average college student; their average age is 31, with ages ranges average from 16 to 67. Native Americans on these campuses outnumber non Native Americans by almost 4 to 1. Frequently, they are the first in their families to attend college. The average income for these students when combined with family income is far below the national average,

most qualify for federal assistance. Female students, often single mothers, have a ratio of 2 to 1 compared to male students. The average number of dependents is 2.8 per student. The percentage of students attending a tribal college with a GED is 18.31 percent. The majority of students who enter degree programs at most tribal colleges do not complete them. Many have poor academic preparation, and family obligations or live in communities without a tradition of formal education.

Tribal colleges provide an opportunity for those who cannot leave their community. Most want improvement in their lives and a job that will keep them on the reservation. Some are dropouts from other institutions seeking the greater emotional support that a tribal college offers. Still other students see the tribal college as a bridge between high school and a non-Indian college or between Indian and Anglo worlds. Tribal colleges, like most community colleges offer classes for those seeking personal improvement or preparing for transfer to another college. (15)

In 1990, of the 103,000 Native Americans attending college, half attended two year institutions. California had the largest enrollment with 21,000; Oklahoma had 9600; Arizona, 8800; and New Mexico, 4500. (16) Also in 1990, approximately 12,000 Indian students attended 27 tribal colleges which constituted 60 percent of Indian higher education student population. Native Americans are the only ethnic minority to increase enrollment, partially due to the tribal college movement.

Treaties and trust responsibilities require the federal

government to educate Indians on reservations. The funding sources for the tribal colleges are the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the federal Education Department, both taxpayer supported agencies. Tribal colleges have been grossly underfunded. (17) When compared to the typical community college, which receives about $7000 per student, the tribal college can expect only $3240, a shortfall of over $3700 per student. While a typical community college can depend on tuition fees and grants, the tribal college is totally dependent on federal support for survival. For most tribal colleges support comes from the Tribally Controlled Community College Assistance Act of 1978 which authorizes $5820 a year per student. The actual amount appropriated has never matched this figure -- in 1989 it actually dropped below $2000 per student. In 1991 it was raised from $2100 to about $3000, but this still remains far below the authorized $5820 a year per student. In October 1991, the Tribal College Act was signed into law. The endowment fund has doubled from $5 million to $10 million. It also authorized matching funds at the rate of 2 to 1 -- for every $1 raised by the institutions, to a maximum of $750,000. Tribal Colleges can apply for grants under Title IV of the act. The Carnegie Foundation influenced the passage of this act when it released its report "Tribal Colleges; Shaping the Future of Native America". In sum, the federal government pays one way or another, if not in support to colleges, then as welfare. It would seem support to colleges pays more dividends. (18)

These tribally controlled colleges have united in an

organization called the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC). In June 1973 the AIHEC was formally organized in Colorado and established corporate headquarters in Denver (later moving to Washington D.C.). The priorities of the AIHEC were the establishment of: an American Indian Higher Education Accreditation Agency, a financial and institutional resource office, a human resource development program, an American Indian Education data bank, and an American Indian Curriculum Development program. As these priorities indicate, the tribally controlled colleges benefited from AIHEC's help in curriculum development, human resource development, administration, board training, fund raising and regional accreditation preparation. The organization was especially helpful to new members who had little or no funding, infrastructure, experience or concept of what was needed to survive as a community college. The AIHEC was "the glue that held the tribal college movement together". As it was gaining a reputation as a technical assistance agency, it was also gaining a national reputation in Washington D.C. In 1974, David Gipp, then the Executive Director of the AIHEC (now the president of United Tribes Technical College, Bismarck, ND) and Lionel Bordeaux, of Sinte Gleska College, began a series of lobbying trips to Congress. They supported the passage of the Indian Self-determination and Education Assistance Act, which authorized local tribal rule. They were met with stereotyping, prejudice and cold shoulders. Bordeaux told of the director of staff for Senate Select committee trying to avoid talking to him by locking

his office door. Eventually the AIHEC developed allies in Congress, including Senator Abourezk of South Dakota, a staunch supporter who introduced several pieces of legislation from 1975 to 1978. On the other hand, the Carter administration seemed distant and vague. The Bureau of Indian Affairs perceived the AIHEC as a threat, and fought against the AIHEC in its support of Indian Post Secondary Education Assistance Act of 1975, and the passage of the Tribally Controlled Community College Act of 1978. Recently, the AIHEC expanded its work into other programs such as the American Indian College Fund and the Tribal College Institute. (19) The American Indian College Fund was launched in 1989 to raise funds from the private sector to support tribal colleges in the United States. The college fund seeks also to raise awareness of the successes of tribally controlled higher education. The AIHEC's journal, "Tribal College" is the only publication that focuses on post secondary education for American Indians; it examines Indian education from the perspective of American Indian leaders. (20) This year the AIHEC is working toward the passage of a plan to designate tribal colleges as "land grant" colleges deserving of special support. A bill cleared the Senate Indian Affairs committee last November and educators are hopeful it will be introduced on the Senate floor early this year. So far the bill has received endorsements from the National Association of State Land-Grant colleges and from historically black colleges and universities.
If passed, the Senate bill would authorize $10 million to tribally controlled post secondary institutions. They would alsc

be eligible for additional support from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The house companion bill is expected to be introduced by Rep. Pat Williams (D-MT) early this year. (21)

Why are tribal colleges so successful? First, tribal colleges reflect local self-determination and local control. Their boards of directors are made up of local tribal leaders. A good example of this local control is at Sinte Gleska college where nine tribal members serve on their board of directors. Five are elected at large within the community, one member serves as a tribal education committee representative, one staff members sits on the board along with two students. All nine have full voting powers. Second, tribal community colleges serve as community learning centers. These colleges address the educational needs of the community. Third, tribal colleges offer a chance for students to attend higher education in their own communities. This is the primary reason Native Americans are the only ethnic minority to demonstrate a substantial increase in enrollment over the past decade. Lastly, tribal colleges are accountable to the U.S. government, Congress, accreditation associations and certification agencies. More importantly, however, tribal colleges are accountable to their students and their communities. They see themselves as being a part of the community. Most importantly, they combine the spirituality and value system of the community with courage and vision from students and staff. All these characteristics make the tribal colleges successful.

Will the tribal college movement survive? What are its

challenges? At the heart of the challenge is the concern that Native Americans have been implementing and managing educational systems which have been validated by non-Indians. Native Americans know their own successes and failures and know how to address them. The future for tribal colleges depends on how well Native Americans use their own resources to find solutions to their present educational challenge, validating their own educational systems. (22) Considering their successes in the past 25 years, their future will be secure and bright. As Alan Lovesee, Associate Council, House committee on Education and Labor said, "I think the tribal colleges are one of the bright spots in all of Indian education". (23) In the future, the light will glow even brighter for Native American post secondary education.

1994 Federal Funding Authorization to Tribal Colleges

COLLEGE	INDIAN STUDENTS	1993 APPROP.	1994 APPROP.
D-Q University	146	$434,204	$919,560
Bay Mills	132	392,568	826,440
Fond Du Lac	68	202,232	424,860
Black Feet	288	856,512	1,810,020
Dull Knife Memorial	123	365,802	774,060
Fort Belknap	157	466,918	983,580
Fort Peck	259	770,266	1,623,780
Little Big Horn	202	600,748	1,268,760
Salish Kootenai	589	1,751,686	3,695,700
Stone Child	179	532,346	1,123,260
Nebraska Indian	262	779,188	1,647,060
Fort Berthold	145	431,230	907,920
Little Hoop	166	493,684	1,041,780
Standing Rock	228	678,072	1,431,720
Turtle Mountain	482	1,433,468	3,026,400
Sinte Gleska	419	1,246,106	2,630,640
Oglala Lakota	654	1,944,996	4,108,920
Cheyenne River	92	273,608	576,180
Sisseton Wahpeton	134	398,516	843,900
LacCourte	269	800,006	1,687,800

SOURCE: AIHEC (1993)

US TRIBALLY CONTROLLED COLLEGES

College	Est.	FTE	Reservation Indian Pop.	Total Reservation
Navajo Community College (AZ)	1968	1,350	143,405	148,451
Sinte Gleska College (SD)	1971	419	8,043	9,696
D-Q University (CA)	1971	146	national	5,825
Oglala Lakota College (SD)	1971	654	11,182	12,215
Turtle Mountain College (ND)	1972	482	6,772	7,106
Northwest Indian College (WA)	1973	533	1,594	3,147
Cheyenne River Com. Coll.(SD)	1973	92	5,100	7,743
Fort Berthold Com. Coll. (ND)	1973	145	2,999	5,395
Standing Rock College (ND)	1973	228	4,870	7,956
Blackfeet Com. College (MT)	1974	288	7,025	8,549
Little Hoop Com. College (ND)	1974	166	2,676	3,588
Dull Knife Memorial Col. (MT)	1975	123	3,542	3,923
Salish Kootenai College (MT)	1976	589	5,130	21,259
Fort Peck Community Col.(MT)	1978	259	5,782	10,595
Sisseton-Wahpeton College (SD)	1979	134	2,821	10,733
Nebraska Indian Com. Col. (NE)	1979	262	1,581	3,099
Little Big Horn College (MT)	1980	202	4,724	6,370
LacCourte Oreilles Ojibwa (WI)	1982	269	1,771	2,408
Fort Belknap Comm. Coll. (MT)	1983	157	2,338	2,508
Bay Mills Com. College (MI)	1984	132	403	462
Stone Child Com. College (MT)	1984	179	1,882	1,954
Fond du Lac Com. College (MN)	1989	68	1,106	3,229
Leech Lake Comm. College (MN)	1993	140	10,000	15,000
Col. of the Menominee Nation (WI)	1993	220	4,000	7,000

(SOURCE: AIHEC and BIA)

FOOTNOTES

1. Bordeaux, Lionel R., "This is the Way it Must be", Tribal College, Volume 2, Number 2 (Fall 90) p.8.

2. Schuyler, Houser, "Underfunded Miracles: Tribal Colleges", Indian Nations at Risk Task Force paper, 1991, pp 1-2.

3. Navajo Community College General Catalog, 1993-1994, p.7.

4. Hill, Michael J., "Indian Music to my Ears", Community College Week, Volume 6, Number 12, (Jan 31, 1994), p. 4.

5. Oglala Lakota College Catalogue, 1994-1995, p.4.

6. Standing Rock College Catalog, 1992-1994, p.3.

7. Nebraska Indian Community College General Catalog, p.5.

8. Stein, Wayne J., "Indian/Tribal Studies Program in the Tribally Controlled Community Colleges" Wicazo-Sa-Review, Volume 2, Number 2, (Fall 86) p.2.

9. Boyer, Ernest J. "Tribal Colleges: Shaping the Future of Native America", Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1989, p.29.

10. Ambler, Marjane, "The Wealth of (Indian) Nations", Tribal College, Volume 4, Number 2, (Fall 92) p. 12.

11. Stein, pp 4-6.

12. Oglala Lakota College Catalogue, 1994-1995, pp 129-132.

13. Manzo, Kathleen K., "Tribal Colleges Promote Ancestral Language, History", Community College Week, Volume 6, Number 12,(Jan 31, 1994) pp 6-11.

14. Stein, pp 5-6.

15. Boyer, 30-32.

16. Hodgkinson, Harold, "The Current Condition of Native Americans ERIC Digest, Sep 92, p.3.

17. Levitan, Sar A., "The Equivocal Prospects for Indian Reservations, Occasional paper 1993-2, Center for Social Policy Studies (May 1993), pp 53-54.

18. Boyer, Paul, "Federal Funding Increases for Tribal Colleges" Tribal College, Volume 2, Number 3, (Winter 1991), p10.

19. Stein, Wayne J. "Founding of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium", Tribal College, Volume 2, Number 1, (Summer 1990) pp 18-22.

20. The American Indian Higher Education Consortium Brochure.

21. Dervarics, Charles, "Education Seek Expanded Support for Tribal Colleges" Community College Week, Volume 6, Number 12, (January 31, 1994), pp 8-11.

22. Bordeaux, pp 8-9.

23. Amiotte, Lowell, "The 4 year Community College: Tribal College, Some lessons in Success for Indian Students in College", A paper presented at the Minorities in Higher Education Conference, (March 1989), p.6

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Telephone conversation with Mr. Joe McDonald, President Salish Kootenai College, Pablo, MT

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